Inside UCLA's money problem: Donors quit writing checks long before AD Martin Jarmond was fired

Despite a lucrative move to the Big Ten, donor giving, sponsorship revenue and fan support declined as UCLA's athletics deficit ballooned, helping set the stage for Jarmond's dismissal

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One year ago, nearly one dozen of UCLA's largest athletic donors approached a Los Angeles Times reporter to say they had lost faith in their athletic director. What almost nobody outside the school noticed was that they had already stopped writing checks.

UCLA raised $18.5 million in donor contributions in fiscal 2022. Then $15.6 million. Then $13.9 million. Then $13.5 million. Donations worsened for three straight years, even though a move from the Pac-12 to the Big Ten in 2024 was supposed to fill the Bruins' treasure chest.

By the time UCLA chancellor Julio Frenk fired athletic director Martin Jarmond on Monday, five days before Bob Chesney's first game as head coach of the football program, UCLA ranked 14th out of 16 public Big Ten schools in donations. The league median was $34.1 million in 2025, according to the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database. Washington, which joined the conference a year after UCLA and plays in the same time zone, raised $52.9 million.

Frenk's letter to UCLA supporters late Monday did not mention donors, but it did outline a major deficit within the athletics department.

"UCLA Athletics currently carries a significant financial deficit, and its current path is not sustainable," he wrote in a letter to UCLA supporters. He said the future goal is a model that "supports itself through the revenue it generates."

The problem is that UCLA's athletics department doesn't support itself, according to financial records filed with the NCAA over the years.

FISCAL YEAR	DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS
2022	$18.5 million
2023	$15.6 million
2024	$13.9 million
2025	$13.5 million

Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database, from NCAA financial reports

The complaints the donors aired publicly a year ago were specific. UCLA was slow to embrace the NIL market, and Jarmond kept football coach Chip Kelly in charge for too long. Perhaps the impetus for the donors' decision to go public with their grievances was the department's accidental leak in 2023 of a spreadsheet containing donors' giving histories, addresses and phone numbers, including Hall of Famer Troy Aikman, in an email. The athletics department never apologized for the gaffe.

"What's happening now feels like watching a train wreck in slow motion," one booster told the Los Angeles Times in October 2025. "What we're seeing isn't just a rough patch. It's institutional apathy. And if the administration doesn't care, why should fans and recruits?"

Corporate money also went south, according to the Knight-Newhouse database. Sponsorship, advertising and licensing revenue fell from $18.3 million in fiscal 2023 to $10.6 million in fiscal 2025 — a 42% drop in two years, and down from $23.8 million in 2019.

"Now is the moment to build a model for Athletics that protects the breadth of our program, creates new opportunities for student-athletes and coaches, and supports itself through the revenue it generates," Frenk said in a letter to supporters Monday. "I believe UCLA should help lead the transformation of intercollegiate athletics: our future must be shaped by purpose -- not by pressure."

BIG TEN SCHOOL	DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS
Ohio State	$69.0 million
Penn State	$64.6 million
Washington	$52.9 million
Illinois	$50.7 million
Michigan	$50.4 million
Oregon	$33.2 million
UCLA	$13.5 million
Maryland	$11.3 million
Rutgers	$8.1 million

Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database

From 2019 through 2023, UCLA's athletic department accepted between $2.1 million and $2.6 million a year in institutional support and student fees — about 2% of revenue. In 2022, UC told its regents athletics was "nearly self-funded." In fiscal 2024, that number increased fifteen times to $31.6 million.

Because that money counts as revenue on the NCAA report, the published deficit is already net of the rescue. The 2025 figure of $21.6 million in net losses, which was reported as progress, exists only because the university provided $31.1 million to subsidize the department. Strip the subsidy out, and UCLA's athletic department generated $120.7 million against $173.4 million in costs.

FISCAL YEAR	REVENUE	EXPENSES	NET	CAMPUS SUBSIDY
2019	$108.4M	$127.3M	−$18.9M	$2.6M
2020	$97.7M	$119.4M	−$21.7M	$2.6M
2021	$47.7M	$110.1M	−$62.5M	$2.6M
2022	$103.1M	$131.1M	−$28.0M	$2.6M
2023	$105.4M	$142.0M	−$36.5M	$2.1M
2024	$119.0M	$170.9M	−$51.9M	$31.6M
2025	$151.8M	$173.4M	−$21.6M	$31.1M

Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database.

Conference revenue rose 88% when UCLA joined the Big Ten, but every dollar UCLA raised through ticket sales, donations and sponsorships decreased. Travel costs and game expenses rose by a third as the program left its time zone to play Big Ten opponents in the Midwest. Meanwhile, the administrative payroll grew five times as fast as the coaches' pay.

LINE	FY2023 (PAC-12)	FY2025 (BIG TEN)	CHANGE
Media and NCAA revenue	$41.2M	$77.3M	+88%
Ticket sales	$20.2M	$18.3M	−9%
Donor contributions	$15.6M	$13.5M	−14%
Sponsorship and licensing	$18.3M	$10.6M	−42%
Game expenses and travel	$24.2M	$33.1M	+36%
Non-coaching staff pay	$23.6M	$31.8M	+35%
Coaches pay	$30.9M	$33.0M	+7%

Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database

By comparison, Oregon, which joined the Big Ten a year later, finished fiscal 2025 with a $2.7 million surplus.

Big Ten mainstay Michigan made $75.9 million in total ticket sales. UCLA made $18.3 million in the second-largest media

market in America.

Not all issues were newly created at UCLA, but the noise in Westwood has increased in recent years. Jarmond inherited many of the issues the school faced over the last several decades. The Rose Bowl also keeps essentially all the premium seating, concession and parking revenue under a lease running through 2044. Pasadena and the Rose Bowl Operating Company sued UCLA in October 2025, alleging the school was maneuvering to move home games to SoFi Stadium, a breach of the lease between UCLA and the Rose Bowl through 2044. The city claims damages exceeding $1 billion, and a judge rejected UCLA's bid to force arbitration in February.

The parties are now scheduled to appear in court for a case management conference on Wednesday, two days after Jarmond's firing.

UCLA gained control of its logo in mid-August, and then, one week before Jarmond was fired, CalMatters sued UCLA under the uiCalifornia Public Records Act for records of players who received $20.5 million in NIL payments during the 2025-26 academic year.

What happens next

UCLA's next NCAA financial filing is due Jan. 15, and it will be the first to include the expense line for revenue sharing with players: $20.5 million in direct payments to as many as 229 athletes under the House settlement. The school is also set to pay its second of three $10 million payments owed to Cal for leaving the Pac-12. Additionally, there's money tied to Chesney's new contract, severance for DeShaun Foster's staff, and eventually Jarmond's roughly $5.9 million buyout.

Obviously, none of those new expenses are included in the current total of $241.1 million in total deficits reported to the NCAA over the last seven years, according to Knight-Newhouse's database.

There is hope, however. Twelve days before Frenk fired Jarmond, the chancellor reclaimed the rights to UCLA's logo, ending a unique 66-year arrangement under which a student organization held the commercial rights to the university's marks. Frenk also placed Tim Harris, a UCLA alum and former president of business operations for the Los Angeles Lakers, in charge of the athletics department on an interim basis. He will work for free with a mandate to "grow revenue through partnerships, licensing and other ventures," Frenk said.

Jarmond's tenure ended with nine NCAA championships in six years, including the women's basketball national title in April, and a seismic move from the Pac-12 to the Big Ten.

He also never managed to balance a budget.